

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 040711
ORIGIN ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 NSCE-00 PM-05 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 INRE-00 DODE-00 /047 R

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O 160114Z PEB 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 040711

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFORN

SUBJECT: POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO MEXICAN MILITARY
MODERNIZATION

1. IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED TO US BY SEVERAL INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS OF THE MEXICAN SCENE THAT GOM INTEREST IN F-5S IS BUT THE TIP OF AN ICEBERG WITH FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MEXICO'S CIVILIAN AND MILITARY LEADERS.

2. IN ESSENCE, THEIR ARGUMENT IS THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE AGAIN BECOMING CRITICAL TO MEXICO'S OVERALL STABILITY. FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER CENTURY BEFORE THE PRE-OLYMPIC DISTURBANCES OF 1968, THE MILITARY HAD BEEN UNQUESTIONINGLY SUBORDINATE TO CIVILIAN AUTHORITY AS EMBODIED IN THE PRESIDENCY, AND THE ARMY'S PRIMARY MISSION WAS TO PRESERVE SOCIAL ORDER AND DISCIPLINE IN RURAL AREAS. OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE ARGUMENT GOES, THIS TRADITIONAL -- AND LARGELY INVISIBLE -- ROLE HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY STRAINED. FEARING THAT GROWING URBAN AND RURAL PRESSURES MIGHT LEAD TO TEMPORARY 1968-LIKE
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BREAKDOWNS OF THE PRI GOVERNING SYSTEM -- OR WORSE -- ELEMENTS WITHIN THE MILITARY COMMAND HAVE BECOME MORE PROFESSIONALLY SELF-ASSERTIVE AND HAVE SOUGHT TO PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR A LARGER ROLE IF NECESSARY. (SOME OF THESE

OBSERVATIONS FIND SUPPORT IN USDAO MEXICO'S IR 68640010 OF

JANUARY 3, 1978.) CIVILIAN POLITICAL LEADERS, IN TURN, HAVE RECOGNIZED THEIR OWN GROWING NEED FOR MILITARY COOPERATION AND SUPPORT TO ENSURE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STABILITY OVER THE LONG HAUL.

3. ONE OBSERVER CONCLUDES THAT THESE TRENDS HAVE NOW LED TO CONSIDERABLE BEHIND THE SCENES SUPPORT FOR A MILITARY MODERNIZATION PROGRAM TO KEEP MEXICO'S ARMED FORCES PROFESSIONALLY OCCUPIED AND POLITICALLY QUIESCENT WHILE ENSURING THEIR LOYALTY AND AVAILABILITY TO THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS WORSEN. THE OBSERVER BELIEVES THAT THIS POSITION ORIGINATED IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, CAME TO BE SHARED BY MANY SENIOR PRI LEADERS UNDER ECHEVERRIA AND HAS NOW BEEN TACITLY REAFFIRMED BY LOPEZ PORTILLO. ONE IMPLICATION OF THIS SCENARIO, OF COURSE, IS THAT RENEWAL OF MEXICO'S ANTIQUATED MILITARY STOCK HAS BECOME A POLITICAL AS WELL AS A MILITARY PRIORITY AND THEREFORE THAT GOM FAILURE TO PRODUCE ON ITS MILITARY MODERNIZATION PROGRAM MIGHT TO AN UNKNOWN EXTENT WEAKEN THE CREDIBILITY AND AUTHORITY OF CIVILIAN LEADERS IN EYES OF MILITARY.

4. WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY'S VIEWS ON A) ACCURACY OF ABOVE ANALYSIS, BOTH IN POLITICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY TERMS, AND B) IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY TOWARD PRESENT AND FUTURE MEXICAN ARMS PURCHASE REQUESTS. IN VIEW OF SENSITIVITY OF SUBJECT, THIS ANALYSIS SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE DISCUSSED
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WITH MEXICAN AUTHORITIES. VANCE

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NNN

*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** SECRET

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL MILITARY RELATIONS, POLITICAL STABILITY
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE040711
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: LEINAUDI:JRR
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780070-0688
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197802112/aaaafkfc.tel
Line Count: 100
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Message ID: 56579cce-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3460062
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 970820
Subject: POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO MEXICAN MILITARY MODERNIZATION
TAGS: MPOL, PFOR, MX, MPOL, PFOR
To: MEXICO
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/56579cce-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014